



# Concept Paper ~ Washington State University's 78<sup>th</sup> Street Agricultural Research and Experimentation Unit

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Washington State University (WSU) is working to conserve resources by consolidating its agricultural research and experimentation efforts in fewer locations. One location where research and experimentation is ending is at the university's 78<sup>th</sup> Street site in Vancouver, Washington. The deed to the property calls for the property to revert to Clark County ownership in the event research and/or experimentation ceases at the site. This concept paper describes ideas the county has developed, in conjunction with others, for the property after reversion.

## BACKGROUND

In early spring 2007 Clark County Commissioner Marc Boldt convened a small meeting to discuss WSU's 78<sup>th</sup> Street property. He believed the property would soon revert back to the county in accordance with the provisions of the deed. He wanted county staff to develop a concept for use of the property once under county ownership. His guidance to the group was to keep the property agricultural and focus on sustainability. He wanted to preserve the site as a part of the county's agricultural heritage and to make it available to the public. He made it clear that he did not favor having the property developed into shopping areas, business parks, or residential areas.

The county assembled staff from a number of departments and began work. A concept was developed that met all of Commissioner Boldt's objectives. The concept was shared with WSU staff (Blair Wolfley and Doug Steinbarger) who made suggestions that were incorporated into a revised concept. The concept has been shared with the public in a limited way and feedback thus far has been very positive. We plan an extensive public process once the property is in county ownership to refine the concept as appropriate.

The concept thus far is explained in the following section. Each element is numbered and referenced on the map of the property on the inside two pages.

## THE CONCEPT

The site will remain principally agricultural with some additional features added for public use. We will partner extensively with existing WSU staff in providing agricultural education, assistance with community gardens, and limited local farmer driven experimentation and research. The site

will also incorporate some park-like features, such as an interpretive historical perimeter trail and a community shelter.

## OUR PARTNERS

As we work to develop the concept we will partner with a number of organizations.

- Our principal partner will be WSU. Our preliminary agreement will be simple and will defer many details to the period following the deed transfer. However, the county commits to paying all costs associated with maintaining the property and will provide office space to remaining WSU Extension staff. In return, WSU staff will assist the county in managing the site and providing services to those who wish to work the site.
- Clark College has expressed an interest in partnering with the county on the site. We will follow up on that interest.
- Master Gardeners Foundation currently works the site, principally in the green houses. We expect to continue this relationship.
- Other groups currently using the site will be allowed to continue their use.
- Public uses will be encouraged.

*Numbers refer to legends on the map:*

## 1. THE BUILDING

The building currently housing WSU staff is of historical significance and deserves to be used in an appropriate manner. Initially it will be kept in its current state for use as office space for WSU staff and to conduct classes that support the use of the property. Subsequently, as events warrant, we will explore the prospects for the building to be used as a restaurant. This may require substantial resources for upgrades and repairs. Depending on the third party restaurant operator we select we may have a partner willing to share in those costs. At the appropriate time we will use our Request for Proposals process or a similar method for finding and contracting with a restaurant operator. The concept would link the restaurant to the site by featuring produce grown on the site, thereby supporting the concepts of sustainable agriculture and buying locally.

We may pursue registering the building as a historic building but further discussions will need to occur before those decisions are made.

## **2. THE CLARK COUNTY FOOD BANK (CCFB)**

The CCFB is looking for land in the western portion of the county for locating a food bank. Given the agricultural nature of the site, locating a food bank there is a natural choice. Partnerships could be created with local groups and volunteers. Some percentage of the produce resulting from these partnerships could be donated to the food bank for distribution to local residents in need.

## **3. RESTORED WETLAND CHANNEL**

There is a poor condition wetland channel just to the south of the buildings on 78<sup>th</sup> Street. We propose to enhance this wetland and make it more scenic and functional.

## **4. AREAS FOR CULTIVATION BY THE VARIOUS PARTNERS**

There are a number of agricultural areas envisioned on the site. For brevity they are all grouped in this section of the paper. We anticipate a large area devoted to community gardening, principally on acreage to the north of the ridge-line running east-west just south of the mid-point between 78<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> streets. On the sloped north side of the ridge-line we will devote some acreage to the Naturally Beautiful Backyards and Master Composter programs. Additional space for those programs will be provided to the south side of the ridge. Finally we propose devoting the acreage along 68<sup>th</sup> Street to Public Works for cultivation of landscaping trees and shrubs for use on park, sewer, and road projects where landscaping is required.

## **5. RESTORED FORESTED WETLAND**

There is a poor condition wetland just to the south of the wetland channel along the eastern edge of the property. We propose to enhance this wetland and plant trees appropriate for the wetland conditions.

## **6. COMPOSTING GAS PLANT**

Since the site will produce organic waste and since soil amendments and fertilizers will be used at the site we believe a small demonstration composting gas plant would be a logical addition. Gas produced at the site could be either burned as a heat source or compressed for use as fuel for gas-powered vehicles. This concept needs further development. Perhaps WSU could bring its expertise to bear on developing this aspect of the concept. This will be one of the site's signature sustainable features.

## **7. COMMUNITY SHELTER**

The view from the ridgeline is exceptional and should be available to the public. To encourage use of the site we propose to construct a shelter of some design on the ridgeline for public use. Details will need to be developed and a design agreed upon through the public process and based on availability of resources.

## **8. REFORESTED AREA**

We propose to reforest some land between the north edge of Hazel Dell Park and just south of the shelter. We will take care not to plant trees that will someday block the view of the three surrounding mountains but will plant as many trees as possible to serve as a carbon dioxide sink and to further beautify the site.

## **9. RENEWABLE ENERGY ARRAY**

The original concept included both wind turbines and solar panels. Subsequent research determined that wind power was not economically viable in this area because sustained wind speeds are too low. We plan to proceed with the installation of solar panels to help provide electricity for use on the site. This contributes to the sustainable nature of the site.

## **10. PERIMETER TRAIL**

To help citizens enjoy the features at the site and to simultaneously contribute to better health we propose constructing a perimeter trail. The trail will include interpretive signage explaining the historic nature of the site (poor farm). Additional signage could explain the sustainable farming practices employed at the site, the composting gas plant, the solar panels, etc.

## **11. POOR FARM CEMETERY**

We propose to substantially rehabilitate the poor farm cemetery as part of the perimeter trail route.

## **CONCLUSION**

This concept will undoubtedly change as we move forward but the theme incorporated in the concept will remain. The concept preserves this site for posterity and will help Clark County residents understand its past. It will also contribute to the goal of encouraging sustainable practices in our community.



